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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 000512

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/31/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [PHUM](#)

SUBJECT: IRELAND STILL OPAQUE ON CHINA ARMS EMBARGO

REF: A. DUBLIN 107

[1](#)B. SKINNER-BENTON E-MAIL OF APRIL 22

Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Mary Daly;  
Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In an April 27 meeting with Department of Foreign Affairs Secretary General Dermot Gallagher, the Ambassador strongly urged the GOI to join other Member States in opposing the proposed lifting of the EU arms embargo against China. Gallagher said that Ireland's position on the embargo sought to acknowledge changes in China since Tiananmen, while maintaining the status quo on EU arms exports. He explained that, if the embargo were lifted, Ireland would press for a Code of Conduct that was binding and effective. The Ambassador noted that the Code did not reassure the USG, given continued significant EU arms transfers to China. Gallagher observed that China's new anti-secession law had changed the mood among Member States, and he expressed confidence that the EU would not take near-term action on the embargo. Although Gallagher was opaque in describing Ireland's position, he indicated that Ireland would not buck the EU trend toward deferring a decision on the issue. End summary.

Ireland's "Subtle Position"

[1](#)2. (C) In an April 27 meeting with Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Secretary General Dermot Gallagher, the Ambassador urged the GOI to join other Member States in opposing the proposed lifting of the EU arms embargo against China. The Ambassador noted that the White House and Congress viewed the embargo as a paramount concern and would take serious interest in Ireland's position on the issue. He also said that lifting the embargo would be detrimental to East Asian security -- a view shared by Taiwan and Japan. He explained that, if the embargo were lifted, an outbreak of hostilities in the Taiwan Strait could pit American forces against a Chinese military armed with advanced European weaponry. The Ambassador highlighted President Bush's intentions to maintain good relations with China, and he cited the President's offer to conduct a strategic dialogue with European partners on Asian regional security issues.

[1](#)3. (C) Gallagher replied that Ireland had taken a "subtle" position on the arms embargo that sought, on one hand, to acknowledge changes in China since 1989 and, on the other, to maintain the status quo on arms transfers. Repeating familiar Irish arguments, he noted that China should not be in the same category of rogue states as Burma and North Korea, which faced similar EU arms bans. He added that there had been improvements in China's overall human rights climate since the Tiananmen era, though the Chinese Government had far to go on that front. By the same token, the GOI would want to see no change, either quantitatively or qualitatively, in EU weapons exports to China if the embargo were lifted. To maintain the status quo, said Gallagher, it would be necessary to make the Code of Conduct, now a political tool relying on good will, into a mechanism that was as binding and effective as the embargo. He remarked that Irish and U.S. views on the arms embargo "were not far apart," and he expressed confidence that the EU would not take near-term action on the proposal to lift the embargo. He also noted that Prime Minister Ahern had had productive discussions with President Bush on the subject on St. Patrick's Day.

The Code of Conduct

[1](#)4. (C) The Ambassador responded that the Code of Conduct did not reassure the USG on the EU's ability to restrain arms sales to China. He pointed out that Member States applying the Code had approved defense exports to China worth over Euro 400 million in 2003. He also said that more recent items approved for sale, including submarine and radar technology, seemed inconsistent with the Code. Gallagher expressed surprise at this information, which, he said, would suggest that the embargo itself had been ineffective. He noted that Ireland was not an arms exporter, and he cited efforts within the EU to strengthen the Code of Conduct and its complementary "tool box."

[1](#)5. (C) The Ambassador closed by saying that the USG would continue to press for an EU consensus opposing the embargo's

removal. He also said that Congress, like the Administration, was fully engaged on the embargo and would expect Ireland to come down on the right side of the issue. Gallagher replied that there was already consensus among Member States on the bottom line of reflecting current realities in their relations with China; there were only different approaches to achieving that goal. He added, however, that China's new anti-secession law had changed the mood among Member States, and he reiterated that there would be no movement on the issue for some time.

Comment: Irish Not Pressing for Action

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16. (C) As in previous discussions with other Irish officials, Gallagher conveyed the GOI's desire to see the embargo lifted, but avoided giving clear indication of Ireland's role in internal EU discussions. Ireland's position on the embargo reflects GOI interests in enhancing relations, primarily commercial ties, with China, as signaled by reciprocal high-level visits since 2003, including Prime Minister Ahern's high-profile trade-focused visit to China this past January (ref A). The positive news is that Ireland apparently sees no interest in bucking the trend among Member States toward deferring a decision on the embargo. As Gallagher mentioned at one point in the conversation, Ireland "won't be swinging from the chandeliers" for action on the issue.

17. (U) The Ambassador did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.  
BENTON